

## **Short Story – Trouble Files A**

### **Part 1**

Name was taken.

Family was taken.

He who had even the land taken away, named himself in his hiding place.

“I —— am 「Ishi」.”

### **Part 2**

—— North-eastern Boundary Wall.

Memorial ceremony was commenced at Kouen City that held 「Rise of the Fire Dragon」 festival sometimes ago.

On top of the clustered spires, flags of all Communities that participated the battle fluttered high, singing praise to them. Three flags were raised at the highest point.

The crimson flag of 「No Name」 that defeated Demon Lord Azi Dahaka.

「Will o' Wisp」 that sacrificed his life and spirit level to create the winning chance.

「Salamandra」 that fought on despite the vast number of sacrifices.

Without their activities this battle would not be victorious. Floor Masters and various Region Masters showed gratitude one after another, and ended the memorial ceremony after promising to provide support towards the rebuilding of the Communities.

After reading out the names of deaths in sequence, when every sequences came to an end.

One of the Floor Masters, 「Great Sage Who Devastate Seas」 Kouryuu, arrived at the hotel 「No Name」 was staying in.

Kouryuu was carrying a rod on his shoulder, after sitting down at the reception, he sighed while twisting his shoulder.

“Aiya, it’s been such a long time since I last attended this kind of formal activity, even my shoulders are stiff.”

“Oi oi, that’s very rude. At least wear mourning clothes today.”

“That’s my line. What is this. I wanted to visit you guys at first, and you turn out to be in full festival mode.”

Kouryuu pointed to the other side of the reception blankly.

The hall of the hotel was holding a feast of indistinguishable style. Grape wine and snacks filled the table, the floor and long desk at the side were also littered with many Japanese wine bottles.

There could be nothing worse than this —— but, accepting it felt unexpectedly good. It was important to mourn for the dead, but displaying a gloomy expression all day was also pointless to those who survived.

It was true that there must be delicacies to heal the heart, apart from places to shoulder the pain.

Kouryuu and Izayoi watched over the feast, sipped some hot tea poured from the tea pot.

“However, all of 「No Name」 actually managed to survive. I was worried half the population might be lost.”

“It isn’t strange to turn out like this. It was only due to many others that bled for us. Such as 「Will o’ Wisp」 or 「Salamandra」.”

Finishing the hot tea in one gulp. As for why Izayoi alone was watching the feast from afar, was probably because he had some thoughts.

Three Headed Dragon was not an opponent he could defeat on his own, this point was very clear to him. Hence there was no need to rely on alcohol to wash away his sorrow.

Just reminiscing about the casualties quietly, remembering their voice also

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“Hey, did you all hear!? At the table where the eating competition is held, a girl who had five consecutive victories is facing off against a ridiculously large man!”

“I heard that she is a fourteen-year-old girl with short hair!”

“That girl was mentioned to have been very active in this battle, exactly which Community is she from?”

“.....”

“.....”

.....

Well, not only mourning counted as remembering the dead. The culture of holding feasts to let the dead rest in peace was also common. There would definitely be some. Except eating competition.

“Aiya, Yō-chan is enjoying herself.”

“Kasukabe is an exception. To her, food is more important than mood, so don’t put us together.”

Kouryuu revealed a wry smile, taking out the sake he borrowed.

“Some wine can only be savoured at this kind of moment. How about it, have a cup also, Izayoi-kun?”

“I will take a cup then.”

Pouring a full cup, Izayoi first tasted with his tongue. Kouryuu also imitated his action with a light laughter.

Suddenly, both of them opened their eyes wide at the source of surprise.

“...Good wine. No, isn’t this too good? Which Community provided this consolation gift.”

“No signature. There is also no logo or flag.”

They tilted their heads in surprise, finished the cup in a gulp.

After a cup, the rich and aromatic rice wine dominated their hearts.

They thought it was newly brewed, but there was no impression of such a rich and mellow wine.

It might be a contribution from some famous wine brewing Community for the memorial ceremony, but not having a logo or flag kept them brooding. Also, even a non-drinker like Izayoi wanted to meet this wine brewing genius. If possible it could be used as a reference.

Just as Izayoi was about to signal the question of where this was taken from.

「Great Sage who Leaves Heaven in Disarray」 Roc Demon King walked over holding the same wine bottle.

“Second brother. It is rare to see you drinking away from the feast.”

“What, Karyou-chan also came?”

*Don’t call me Karyou-chan*, Roc Demon King sat down after correcting him.

Noticing Izayoi who sat together with them, Karyou looked at his face joyfully.

“I was wondering who is it, isn’t this the brat from 「No Name」? You played a crucial role this time. I might as well ask for your name.”

“What are you saying all of a sudden. Shouldn’t the names be announced during the meeting before?”

“It was worthless to remember that time. Since I never thought about conquering that Demon Lord. —— Remembering from now on won’t be a loss, right?”

With a flirtatious smile, Roc Demon King took out the wine bottle.

It seemed that she was not asking for free. If a beauty like her would pour wine for him, saying his name again was nothing.

As Izayoi passed his cup for her to fill, he suddenly remembered something and asked Karyou.

“Speaking of which, where did this wine come from? Is it from an acquaintance Community?”

“You drank without knowing? Second Brother?”

“Yeah, but it seems you are hiding something. Is it my acquaintance?”

Hearing Kouryuu's enquiry, Karyou showed a never seen before expression of shock and sighed. Her glare turned cold, and even carried some detest.

A man that did not feel hurt being stared at like this by a beauty close to him probably did not exist.

Kouryuu savoured the taste, desperately searching in his memories. A Community that brewed such fine wine, he would remember after hearing it once.

“...You really don't know?”

“No, wait! I will remember! I will remember it immediately!”

Kouryuu endured his sworn sister's cold stare.

Right at that moment, cheers resounded from the feast side.

“Su...such madness! Those two, the food warehouse has been emptied!”

“Which Community are they from!?”

“「No Name」 and that giant —— No, hey, wait! That flag, don't tell me, isn't that 「Great Sage Who Wanders the Wind」!?”

*Pui!* Kouryuu spat out the wine in his cup. Kouryuu then stood up and surveyed his surrounding. At the same time in the center of the feast, a giant that needed one to look up stood.

A head of messy hair like a beast, untrimmed stub grew around his mouth. The flag-like cloth woven around his right shoulder had 「Tsūfū」 and 「Shuten」 carved.

Kasukabe Yō who was competing against him in the eating competition looked up at the giant in dissatisfaction with a mouth full of red bean paste.

Yō pouted as she wiped her mouth.

“...Such a pity. If the food storage is not finished I could have won.”

“What is it little girl, you can still eat! You sure can eat for such a petite body!”

“Uncle is the one that can eat. I had never lost in this kind of game before.”

“No no, it’s really the limit! This is harsh for an old fella like me with a beer belly!”

*Gahaha!* The giant raised a barbaric laughter.

Kouryuu spoke out in surprise without even thinking.

“Bro...Brother! Is it Macaque big brother!?”

“Ah?...Oh oh, Kouryuu! Long time no see brother! Doing well!?”

“Of course! Big brother is also doing fine!”



Kouryuu walked over, and was tapped on the shoulder by 「Great Sage Who Wanders the Wind」 that came over with steps enough to surpass the height of a person. To him who had spent the life of a drifting log, probably nothing was merrier than to meet his sworn brother again. Kouryuu ceased his usual suspicious smile, let out a genuine childish smile. 「Great Sage Who Wanders the Wind」 saw the wine bottle he was holding, pointed to it and chuckled.

“Oh, you also drank the wine of this old fella. —— Say, how is it? The rice wine brewed meticulously by this old fella this year is a masterpiece, right?”

“So it is big brother’s wine! Then of course it’s a good wine!”

“Ain’t that right! Oi, someone bring the wine barrel! That little girl just now, want to continue our competition to determine a victor?”

“That’s fine, but I never drank alcohol before?”

Kasukabe tilted her head, but still took a barrel of wine honestly.

It seemed like this meant that she was going to fight again in her specialty territory.

On the other hand, after hearing the person was 「Great Sage Who Wanders the Wind」, Izayoi couldn’t sit still anymore. There were not many records about this Demon King, what was known about him was only that he was a type of Ape God. Him being curious was only natural.

Izayoi also put down his cup and stood up, drawing close to those two with sparkling eyes.

“Looking energetic, Uncle. Let me in as well.”

“Oh oh, that’s fine! Who are you brat?”

“Sakamaki Izayoi from 「No Name」. Nice to meet you, 「Great Sage Who Wanders the Wind」 Uncle Macaque.”

Listening to Izayoi announcing his name in a light tone, he slapped his knee and shook his head.

“Aiyaiya, such a nostalgic name. Although it’s great that even a Japanese man like you know about that name, but now I am called Shuten-dōji after returning to Japan, so call me by that name!”

*Gahaha!* Shuten-dōji drank his wine while laughing.

Izayoi’s eyes opened even wider.

Shuten-dōji — speaking of him, was one of the few daiyōkai<sup>[1]</sup> that existed in the God pantheon of Japan’s Heian Period. Although not as famous as Kumiho<sup>[2]</sup>, the Wandering Demon King possessed spirit power that could rival it.

The yōkaiou<sup>[3]</sup> commanded wanderers, gamblers and chivalries that did not conspire with the ruler of era and shogun who strayed away from the righteous path.

This was the Demon King of Japanese Pantheon of Gods Shuten-dōji.

“...You surprised me again. If you ask me why, then of course it’s because the easternmost yōkai has taken the post of one of the Seven Great Demon King.”

“That’s right. Although it’s called Seven Great Sages, there are only Equalling Heaven, Pacifying Heaven and Devastating Seas, these three Great Sages from Chinese mythology. The rest are just an uninvited old fella like me who came from the easternmost and the runaway princess from India, also some guys that gathered from the Silk Road, already unclear of who is who!”

*Gahaha!* Shuten-dōji laughed gallantly.

But if that was the fact, then the Seven Great Sages was a big alliance built by yōkai all around the world. If this was the truth, then the war instigated by the Seven Great Sages would become a war that literally divides the Little Garden into two.

A brave tale of this degree, he must listen carefully. Izayoi with his eyes beaming, forcefully sat before Yō and Shuten-dōji, announced right off the bat.

“That’s good. I didn’t manage to get the details from Kouryuu previously. Speaking about the war of the Seven Great Sages from a Japanese youkai’s perspective, please let me hear about it.”

“That’s my line. Rumor says you are Canaria’s disciple? How about it? Is that little girl still energetic?”

—— Izayoi’s hand holding the cup went stiff.

However the others did not notice his action, Kouryuu and Karyou spoke.

“What, Izayoi is the disciple of Canaria?”

“Same. That arrogant little girl even took on disciples. Time passes by so quickly.”

Kouryuu laughed joyfully, Karyou also raised the corner of her mouth.

Izayoi asked without changing his expression.

“...What is this? You are all Canaria’s acquaintances?”

“Of course, since we all experienced the War of Dystopia. We can’t possibly not know the chief commander of our force.”

“Un. She was Wukong’s disciple, we also took care of her often. Speaking of which, to you we can be considered your Great Uncle and Aunt!”

“...I don’t want such an uncute nephew.”

Kouryuu and Shuten-dōji spoke in nostalgic tone. Karyou turned her head away.

Izayoi also shook his head indicating that could not happen.

Canaria never once mentioned about Little Garden, also never asked him to save 「No Name」. The reason behind it was unclear. Fundamentally he was not Canaria's disciple. They were just playing around. Travelling the world together, enjoying together. Their relationship was only this, things concerning 「No Name」 was never once ——

“—— Izayoi boy. Do you know the outcome of a race named 「Ishi」?”

“——...”

“...? What is it, brat?”

“...No, nothing. Let's talk about the brave tale of the Seven Great Sages first. It's a rare occasion for three of the seven sages to gather here. We can also offer the tales as a local specialty to the deceased.”

“I know I know. This can only be considered a warm-up compared to the death match against Azi Dahaka, but I, Shuten-dōji, will also tell a tale to pay respect to the dead! Oi, the others also bring their cups over!”

*Gahaha!* Shuten-dōji gathered the people with a gallant laugh. The feast immediately livened up.

The chance to hear both the tale of the war of Seven Great Sages and Azi Dahaka's battle was hard to come by. It probably wouldn't happen again even after living another 100 years.

Those who wanted to participate cheered and readied their cups and barrels.

Izayoi who recollected his feelings also raised his cup, shouting kanpai<sup>[4]</sup> together.

### **Part 3**

—— The feast continued even when the moon reached its highest point.

The war between the seven yōkaiou Shuten-dōji mentioned and Jade Emperor, Daoism, Celestialism, Buddhism, could be considered a war that gambled “Non-human” race’s pride from the start to the end.

The storyteller Shuten-dōji was basked in cheers from thousands of people, yōkai participants all watched him with eyes of admiration.

「Great Sage Equalling Heaven」 was a demi-celestial spirit that was not given a destiny, possessing enormous strength and spirit power innately, born as a being that was not human, yōkai nor god. Although she was recruited by the Jade Emperor later, it was actually a plot to kill her after using up her talents. Despite being kept in a cage, she was worshipped by many earth deities and yōkai.

Due to keeping 「Great Sage Equalling Heaven」 close to him, Jade Emperor felt an even stronger threat.

If this beautiful demi-celestial spirit bared her fangs, she might become an existence that would overthrow Jade Emperor.

To pacify the anxiety of Jade Emperor, his vassals framed 「Great Sage Equalling Heaven」, treated her as the most despicable yōkai and punished her, attempted to seal her under the crust of the star.

Those who stood up to prevent such a vicious act of violence, were none other than the Seven Demon Kings that had crossed their sake cups and sworn with their souls as siblings —— the warriors later known as Seven Great Sages.

“Uh huh...Feels like 「Great Sage Equalling Heaven」 was less sinful than imagination, you decorated the contents right?”

“Of course it’s decorated. Isn’t it always like this if you let one side of the parties tell the tale?”

*Gahaha!* Shuten-dōji poured wine for Izayoi while laughing. Looking around, the others had already gotten drunk and slept. This could also be said due to Shuten-dōji’s ——

“Only talents that can follow up this old fella’s drinking can listen to my tales! Good, let’s begin the Game of tales!”

—— The reason for such declaration.

The result was like that, corpses laid around everywhere.

Glutton Kasukabe Yō, also slept peacefully like a normal girl. But she still managed to drink two barrels of wine, they could only say as expected of her.

Shuten-dōji finished his drink, revealed a menacing smile.

“Hng hng. Those God Pantheons also selfishly spread legends that favored themselves. This old fella also has the right to speak as I like! Which side to believe, well, the decision is the audience.”

“You got a point.”

“Ah ah. That’s how it is. —— However.”

Shuten-dōji put down the empty cup, showed a longing expression.

“—— Battle of Seven Great Sages, had too many casualties.”

“.....”

“Truthfully speaking, the winner had already been decided before the war. There might be a way if there was only one God Pantheon, but after all the whole Eastern Asian Cosmology was our enemy. It’s impossible to win. To the seven of us, it was a fight to protect self-dignity, so it didn’t matter even if it was a losing battle...However, once remembering the thousands of comrades that accompanied us to hell, there was still a sense of guilt.”

For the sake of carrying out one’s will. That war was supposed to be like that.

But due to the yōkai, spirits, and earth deities that admired them gathered up, it caused the war of Seven Great Sages to become the largest scale war in the history. The lives lost in the process were uncountable.



To carry out one's will —— but too many comrades had died.

“...Well, if you don't want to answer it's fine. Amongst the seven of you, who had survived?”

“Bull Demon King, Kouryuu, Karyou, this old fella, and Wukong, us five. —— Hehe, such irony. It was supposed to be our fight, in the end five of us survived.”

“Hah? What are you saying? Since five of you survived, isn't it the same as their victory.”

Izayoi creased his brows and stared at Shuten-dōji. This conclusion made Shuten-dōji open his eyes wide.

“...What do you mean?”

“Am I wrong? Those guys who admired you all and gathered, rushed to their death because they didn't want you guys to die. In the end you might not have won against the God Pantheons...Despite so, they saved the lives of five yōkaious. Although they didn't save all, they could still boast before the God Pantheons. They must be cheering banzai at the Yomi Road<sup>[5]</sup>.”

Yōkaious determined to carry out their will. Their vassals pledged to protect their lord, following their will.

And they fulfilled that pledge.

“The most difficult thing in a war is not victory. It is how to end it. Although some may use extermination as an extreme method, it is not very realistic. A war developed into that scale would definitely have a few that slipped through. Those escaped would eventually return if they wanted revenge. —— To keep the situation from developing into that way, was because it was compromised with the heads of two of the Seven Great Sages. And what caused the God Pantheons to compromise, is none other than the hills of corpse of your comrades.”

“...En.”

Refilling his cup, Shuten-dōji narrowed his eyes.

Shuten-dōji watched Izayoi with his narrowed eyes and laughed aloud.

“How to put it, it’s that. You are indeed Canaria’s disciple.”

“Not some disciple. Just playmate.”

“Hoho. Then you are a respectable playmate. In other words, you are very similar to that little girl.”

*Gahaha!* Shuten-dōji laughed gallantly after making a joke.

Izayoi grabbed the wine barrel and refilled his cup helplessly.

The moon had past its peak, starting to fall. It was a really long chat.

Izayoi and Shuten-dōji reached out for the third wine barrel together.

At this point a good drinker was unable to describe them. Leaving aside Shuten-dōji, it was questionable if Izayoi's digestive system had malfunctioned.

“But brat, you really can drink. This is completely different from Canaria.”

“We aren't blood related, how can we be similar in that kind of area. That fellow's tolerance is just too low. One cup is all it takes to get drunk.”

“Oh oh, yeah that's right. Speaking of that little girl, she would not touch alcohol regardless of any feast. When she fell after being forced to drink, it caused a big commotion.”

*Gahaha!* Shuten-dōji slapped his knee and laughed. Izayoi also chuckled at this point. Thinking carefully, he had never heard about the stories of Canaria in Little Garden. Not interested was one of the reasons, but the main reason was that the only one who he could talk to was that pervert (Croix).

Izayoi knew that he was not the type to be friendly with others. But he seemed to be compatible with this Shuten-dōji.

He was indeed a chivalric Demon King.

The reason he accidentally spilled the beans, must have been from the influence of this man's character.

“...Well, she might be like that in any place. Regardless of Little Garden or Outer Worlds. She was the same when travelling with me.”

“Hoho. Travelling means?”

“Ah ah. I remember it was ——”

Shaking his cup, letting the reflection of the moon waver, Izayoi began reminiscing the past.

That was, when he was just thirteen years old.

The time when a certain religion extremist assaulted a certain settlement.

## **Notes and References:**

1. Daiyōkai - a high-ranking demon.
2. Kumiho - Nine-tailed Fox spirit.
3. Yōkaiou - King of the yōkai.
4. Kanpai - calling cheers to drink.
5. Yomi Road - Road to afterlife.